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**Lindsay O'Neill. *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World. The Early Modern Americas.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. 264. \ \$47.50 (cloth).**

Leonie Hannan

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He supplements these port records with various other primary sources, including newspapers, merchant correspondence, and government documents.

His writing is crisp, focused, and engages the reader throughout. Moreover, O'Malley carefully and thoughtfully discusses his use of evidence along with providing an exemplary thirty-one page appendix, "Estimating the Scale of the Intercolonial Slave Trade," to further discuss the important details structuring the data and his database. In addition, the book contains seven useful maps, eleven figures, and twenty-six tables. In an especially welcome addition, there are footnotes instead of endnotes, which makes scholarly tracking of O'Malley's evidence much easier and is an especially useful characteristic that makes this book important as both as a teaching tool and model of research clarity. Unfortunately, while there is an index, there is no bibliography.

A book built around quantitative data might easily become an overwhelming display of numerical prowess but from the first lines of his introduction through the last line of the epilogue O'Malley carefully constructs a human history that includes a wide array of speculators, privateers, pirates, plantation owners, slave ship captains, and of course the enslaved Africans constantly commodified through their many passages.

In his discussion of the forced transportation of enslaved Africans after landing at various Atlantic entrepôts, O'Malley successfully connects the "the backcountry and the Atlantic economy" by showing the specific and particular economic transactions behind these intercolonial slave trades. For the historiography and master narrative about the United States he reveals the mechanisms by which an earlier phase of the movement of slaves within colonies predated the later, more widely known interstate slave system of nineteenth-century America. In the Caribbean, constant movement across imperial borders began in the seventeenth century and then intensified during the latter half of the eighteenth century when British slave traders tried to increase their slave sales to French and Spanish buyers in the islands.

By emphasizing the extensive trading networks in operation after the "middle passage," O'Malley reveals a massive Atlantic network of economic activity that was central to the development of capitalism. However, he relegates to the footnotes his engagement with the contentious debate over the relationship between slavery and capitalism, claiming his work "resonates" with some of the wider arguments of Eric Williams and his contemporary advocates concerning the impact of slavery and economic development. While clearly attentive to both the current and long-standing debates about the relationship between capitalism and slavery, this is one area that O'Malley might have extended the implications of his own evidence to directly engage more in this crucial and ongoing conversation. Nevertheless, this outstanding book will find many appreciative readers and hopefully generate further inquiries into many of the issues raised by O'Malley's evidence and arguments.

*Eric Kimball*, University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg

LINDSAY O'NEILL. *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World*. The Early Modern Americas. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. 264. \$47.50 (cloth).

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*The Opened Letter* brings alive in intricate detail the networks that operated among the elite in the early modern British world. This book does not limit itself to the question of how correspondence facilitated social and economic connections but, instead, tackles the more complex issue of how early modern networks actually operated. Lindsay O'Neill's answer lies in the

interplay between technologies of communication, face-to-face interactions, traditional communities, and new sites of sociability and intellectual exchange. O'Neill focuses on the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and, therefore, attends to the era immediately after the establishment of the first permanent, national postal system, a period in which the newspaper press also flourished. O'Neill argues convincingly that these twin processes both met the needs of, and fed into, the expansion of British influence around the globe. She further suggests that the growing circulation of letters and news related closely to the increasing geographical mobility of the British elite who became better economically and socially connected in this period—enjoying the “networking” opportunities of clubs, assemblies, and coffeehouses alongside the more traditional arenas of Parliament and the court.

As “network” is an anachronistic term, the introduction contains a detailed explanation of the choice of terminology. In this discussion of language, O'Neill evokes early modern understandings of what it meant to be “networked,” and by using the term, she bypasses some of the historiographical debates around concepts such as friendship, neighborliness, and community, and is able to deal instead with the “meta-phenomena” of connectedness in British society. O'Neill identifies two main kinds of network: the web of connection associated with local society (family, community, and neighborhood contacts); and those networks focused on an idea, belief, or interest. Rather than viewing elite networking in this period as something completely new in character, O'Neill carefully reveals how novel forms of connection built upon and adapted existing and traditional allegiances. Face-to-face sociability lost none of its importance in an era of increased epistolary activity and rapid relay of news via the printing press. Instead, where technologies such as the post facilitated new social and economic relationships and styles of communication, they also interacted with all of the old mechanisms for building social support and promoting personal agency.

The book's focus is on eight key individuals (seven men and one woman) and their personal networks. These letter writers have left collections of collated correspondence, letter books, and diaries that provide highly appropriate source material for the exploration of networks. Reflecting the character of these individuals' correspondences, O'Neill focuses strongly on relationships of economic value, such as those of estate management and business, and connections based on intellectual exchange. As O'Neill asserts, “when a few hundred letters become a few thousand—larger patterns of dependence and exchange surface” (2). This is a work of detailed archival research enhanced by some fascinating visualizations of particular networks, the latter adding greatly to the reader's understanding of the characteristics and diversity of epistolary communities.

In the first two chapters O'Neill presents a very detailed picture of the relationship between correspondence and networks, incorporating discussion of the pragmatic, emotional, and operational aspects of letter writing and showing their interrelated nature. The themes of trust, reciprocity, mobility, and stability resound throughout. In chapters 3 and 4 she moves the discussion along to consider the networks themselves—weak networks and strong ones; connections that were long term and regular versus those that were fleeting or sporadic; and local allegiances in contrast with international acquaintances. I would question aspects of her analysis in chapter 3 of women's interactions with letter writing in light of many recent studies that demonstrate the incredible breadth, power, and dynamism of female epistolary networks and allegiances in this period. However, gender is not a primary concern of this book and the sample of correspondents (with only one main female example) lends itself to an emphasis on the experiences of the male elite of British society. The last two chapters discuss key developments of the era that influenced the patterns and processes of networking. In chapter 5 O'Neill explores the interactions promoted by new societies and institutions, and in chapter 6 she engages with the burgeoning news culture of the early eighteenth century, her analysis teasing out how the dissemination of news operated across personal and public realms. In this last chapter she returns the discussion to the importance of trust and reciprocity in network building, which she emphasized in the opening chapters of the book.

O'Neill's book helpfully visualizes early modern networks as flexible, overlapping, full of agency, and encompassing of traditional and new forms of social interaction. *The Opened Letter* endeavors to cross boundaries—between nation states and between public and private realms. However, in her attempt to blur distinctions between “public and private spheres,” O'Neill's analysis does not fully acknowledge the weight of literature that has heavily criticized a view of eighteenth-century society as being composed of two (separate) spheres. O'Neill also points to the way some of the developments she discusses could be used to explain a transition into “modernity.” However, here O'Neill makes an important intervention. Instead of seeing letter writing as an activity that cultivated the individual “self,” O'Neill argues strongly for the letter as an instrument that fostered communal ties and informal networks that dropped below the radar of state or institution. Letters were “less objects of personal and private meditation and more objects of larger social use” (201). Others will argue that they were both, but *The Opened Letter* makes an important contribution to an expanding field of scholarship on letter writing, which has acknowledged the multiplicity of connections possible through correspondence but stressed the intensity of individual epistolary relationships. Lindsay O'Neill's book reveals complex interpersonal networks, explores their diverse characteristics and powerful influence on society, and then places these webs of connection in the context of wider developments in the early modern British world. This is an impressive achievement.

Leonic Hanman, Queen's University, Belfast

RICHARD D. ORAM, ed. *The Lordship of the Isles*. The Northern World Series. Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. xii + 336. \$163.00 (cloth).  
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One of the most exciting trends in Scottish historical writing in the last decade has seen scholars shift their focus to the western seaboard of the medieval kingdom, typically viewed as suffering a dearth of conventional written record but acknowledged also as rich in surviving archaeological and material sources. The thirteen essays in this book edited by Richard Oram draw on the fruits of this recent work, with the twin aims of offering novel conclusions about the nature of MacDonald lordship between 1300 and 1600 and marking paths for future research. In most respects the volume succeeds admirably in achieving these objectives.

Collectively, the essays present compelling evidence for rejecting the long held (and drearily enduring) portrayal of the lordship as a contested cultural space from which backward-looking, independent Gaels battled an authoritarian crown determined to bring to heel a traditionally independent and rebellious region. Instead, the book makes a series of (mostly) well-supported arguments for treating lordly power in the Isles as anything but static or hegemonic in the economic, political, and cultural spheres. Just as the geographical extent and the political influence of the Anglo-Scottish border lands and the principality of Wales shifted as a consequence of relations with the late medieval and early modern English polity, so too did the lands that formed part of the lordship contract or increase from one generation to the next in response to specific circumstances (for example after 1436, when Alexander, third Lord of the Isles also became earl of Ross). Likewise, the family and tenurial affinities that formed the basis of successive lords' power and authority changed over time.

Another theme that emerges clearly from the collection is the sophistication of the MacDonald lords in navigating the vagaries of Scottish politics in the late medieval and early modern periods. Few noblemen were as skilled at taking advantage of opportunities to benefit from the weakness of individual monarchs or the instability characteristic of royal minorities. MacDonald ambitions, moreover, brought members of the kindred into close contact not only with their own kings but,